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THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN RESEARCH

TITLE VIII PROGRAM

1755 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
PROJECT INFORMATION:

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COUNCIL CONTRACT NUMBER: 810-21

DATE: August 22, 1996

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1 The work leading to this report was supported in part by contract funds provided by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, made available by the U. S. Department of State under Title VIII (the Soviet-Eastern European Research and Training Act of 1983, as amended). The analysis and interpretations contained in the report are those of the author(s).
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EXTREME RIGHT PARTIES AND THE EXTREMIST ELECTORATE IN CROATIA, 1990-1995

JILL A. IRVINE

Executive Summary

This article examines popular support for ultranationalist views and political parties in Croatia from 1990 to 1995. What segments of the population support ultranationalist parties and why? Is their share of the overall population increasing? How has support for extremist parties changed over time? To what extent can changes in their electoral performance be explained by shifts in popular support for right wing views? The answers to these questions may provide a framework for understanding the varying electoral successes of ultranationalist parties among the Yugoslav successor states and their possible future political role.

In examining popular support for ultranationalist views and political parties in Croatia, this article begins with a brief overview of the organizational features and political programs of the major right wing parties in Croatia, the Croatian Party of Rights (Hrvatska stranka prava, HSP) and the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ). Both parties have attracted a significant portion the right wing electorate although there are important differences between the two. The article then examines the electoral performance of the HDZ and HSP in the '90, '92 and '95 elections. While the HSP began this period with potentially great electoral support, its voters have been siphoned off by the HDZ, which has moved increasingly to the right. Some differences between these two political parties are considered further by investigating the demographic profile of extreme right voters and their political choices. The article concludes with an analysis of the future political prospects of the main extremist parties and of their impact upon the process of democratization in Croatia.

The emergence of nationalist and right extremist political parties in Eastern Europe has often been portrayed as the result of unscrupulous leaders who have manipulated the populace for their own political purposes. While this picture of political elites in the former Yugoslavia obviously contains some truth, it overlooks the complex interaction among elites and mass publics that forms the politics of extremism in this area. Political parties provide a good way to study this interaction since they are the main conduit of elites mass relations in post-communist (and democratic) societies. This study of extremist political parties and their electorates suggests that, however they acquired these opinions, a significant bloc of voters holds right extremist and ultranationalist views. Indeed, evidence presented here indicates that both the HDZ and the HSP have reflected the opinions of a significant portion of their electorate, in other words, that there is a high degree of correspondence between voters' views and values and the parties' platforms and policies.
The extremist electorate in Croatia resembles its counterpart in other European countries in that it is young, religious and slightly more likely to be from urban areas. Extremist parties usually attract a youth protest vote and this also seems to be the case in Croatia. Nevertheless, a large number of extremists are from the generation (forty to fifty years of age) which is reaching its peak in terms of political and professional activity. This may account in part for the greater public visibility of right extremists in Croatia than in many other European countries. In Croatia we can identify two groups of right extremists which are attracted to different political parties. While HSP voters can be characterized as primarily ultranationalist and militantly anti-Serb, HDZ voters are ultraconservative and highly suspicious of liberals’ emphasis on individual rights. Both groups of extremists, however, see national unity as a primary political goal. Despite the acute social and political strain in Croatia during the past several years, the extreme right electorate has continued to drop slightly and, at about 8% of the population, is roughly equivalent in size to the extreme right in other European countries. Nevertheless, intolerance toward other national groups, a marked feature of right extremists, is displayed by roughly one quarter of the population in Croatia. The political impact of this animosity toward Serbs, Muslims and other national groups depends, to a certain extent, on the activities of the extreme right parties, particularly the ruling HDZ.

The HDZ has attempted to capture the extreme right vote and, judging from the results of the 1995 election, it has largely succeeded. Although the HSP remains a more homogenous extreme right party, its electoral position has continued to decline. This poor performance is a result of a lack of appeal of its extremist positions among the wider electorate. Moreover, a portion of its core electorate appears to have become disaffected with the extreme right party. Repression and co-optation by the HDZ which have contributed to factional struggle within the HSP, and the disbanding of the HSP’s paramilitary force, HOS, have caused the extreme right electorate to fall away from the HSP in increasing numbers. HSP splinter groups may succeed in founding a new political party that will be able to surmount some of these weaknesses. However, voters may continue to find it difficult to distinguish ideologically between the HDZ and a new HSP.

The HDZ currently appeals to a much wider segment of the population than the HSP but evidence suggests that it has drifted rightward during the past several years. This drift appears to be occurring both among the party’s elite and its constituency. The departure of more moderate elements and the co-optation of extremist elements within the HDZ leadership, the increasing centralization of the party, and Tudjman’s affinity with the radical nationalist wing have contributed to this strengthening of right extremism among HDZ elites. At the same time, the defection of many HSP voters to the HDZ in the 1995 elections has resulted in an increase in the HDZ electorate holding extremist views. This growth in extremists among the leadership and the electorate does not bode well for the democratic orientation of the ruling party. Although the HDZ continues to suffer from factional struggle, it seem unlikely to splinter as long as Tudjman remains its leader, which he
has vowed to do for the foreseeable future. The HDZ will probably continue to resemble more of a movement than a political party—w ith a large and influential extremist element—which is used by Tudjman and other HDZ leaders for state-building purposes. Thus, a relatively small number of well-positioned right extremists in Croatia could thwart the establishment of democratic institutions and practices desired by the rest of the population.

In conclusion, ultranationalist and extreme right views are held not only by a few political leaders. They are expressed by a relatively small but, in terms of its age, key portion of the population. This group has been increasingly attracted to the ruling HDZ, contributing to its shift to the right. Thus, the danger of right extremism in Croatia stems not only from the number of its adherents but from their strong political position within the ruling party. The US should therefore concentrate not only on influencing the actions of extremists leaders, but in supporting measures that create a democratic political culture in Croatia. It should also oppose the rightward drift of the ruling HDZ since this party will most likely continue to dominate the Croatian political scene for the next decade. Extremist views should be marginalized, as they are in much of Western Europe, by rejecting them from the programs of mainstream political parties and by isolating the extremist electorate on the fringe of public life.
EXTREME RIGHT PARTIES AND THE EXTREMIST ELECTORATE IN CROATIA, 1990-1995

Introduction

This article examines popular support for ultranationalist views and political parties in Croatia from 1990 to 1995. Since the collapse of state socialism in 1989, an increasing amount of attention has been paid to the impact of nationalism on the political transformation occurring in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Confident pronouncements about the final victory of capitalism and democracy have been replaced by a sense of unease about the direction of change. While journalists lament that the revolution has been hijacked by the extreme right, scholars attempt to understand the dynamics of nationalist politics in the formerly state socialist countries. Investigating the impact of nationalism on regime change and democratization is particularly important in the former Yugoslavia where strong ultranationalist parties and their paramilitary forces have played a significant role in the outbreak of violent conflict. An analysis of the electoral performance of extremist political parties in Croatia may provide a better understanding of the causes of this conflict and the prospects for successful democratization of Yugoslavia's successor states in its aftermath.

In analyzing the process of regime transition in Eastern Europe there has been much debate about whether it has been shaped primarily by elite or mass actions. Previous literature on regime transition placed great weight on political elites; others have argued for the necessity of “bringing society back in” to regime transition theory. While there has been little cross fertilization between the study of nationalism and regime change (the former being concerned primarily with developing general theories of nationalism), they have grappled with many similar questions, among them the relative roles and causal weight of elite and mass action. Some scholars have emphasized the manipulation of mass publics by political entrepreneurs who employ nationalism as a tool for realizing their own political ambitions. They emphasize the institutional resources provided regional elites under state socialism and the facility and effectiveness with which many communists have taken up the nationalist cause. Others point to the mass appeal of its “ideology for hard times” and stress the critical danger of support for the extreme right by mass publics. The latter point to a civil society decimated by state socialism and buffeted by economic and political dislocation after its collapse.

This study is based upon the assumption that the politics of nationalism involves a complex interaction between elites and mass publics. A full understanding of the impact of nationalism on regime transition in Eastern Europe must examine the popular basis of support for ultranationalist political parties and groups as well as the resources and behavior of their leaders. What segments of the population support these parties and why? Is their share of the overall population increasing?
How has support for extremist parties changed over time? To what extent can changes in their electoral performance be explained by shifts in popular support for right wing views? The answers to these questions may provide a framework for understanding the varying electoral successes of ultranationalist parties among the Yugoslav successor states and their possible future political role.

In examining popular support for ultranationalist views and political parties in Croatia, this article begins with a brief overview of the organizational features and political programs of the major right wing parties in Croatia, the Croatian Party of Rights (Hrvatska stranka prava, HSP) and the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ). Both parties have attracted a significant portion the right wing electorate although there are important differences between the two. The article then examines the electoral performance of the HDZ and HSP in the '90, '92 and '95 elections. While the HSP began this period with potentially great electoral support, its voters have been siphoned off by the HDZ, which has moved increasingly to the right. Some differences between these two political parties are considered further by investigating the demographic profile of extreme right voters and their political choices. The article concludes with an analysis of the future political prospects of the main extremist parties and of their impact upon the process of democratization in Croatia.

Characteristics of Ultranationalist Parties

The post-communist period in Eastern Europe has been characterized by a rapid expansion of political parties and party activity. Indeed, it has not been uncommon for thirty or forty parties to appear before elections in these countries, and at least half that number to disappear again during the next several months. Those parties possessing certain organizational, financial and other resources have fared better in the scramble to achieve parliamentary representation, although these factors alone have not been sufficient to ensure their political longevity. Both the HSP and the HDZ began the period of Croatian independence with considerable resources. The HSP, like some other extremist parties in Eastern Europe, could draw upon its name recognition, since it claimed to be the direct continuation of the HSP founded by Ante Starcevic in 1861. The HDZ, although a new political party, first staked a claim to leadership of the Croatian independence movement and therefore entered the post communist period with broad support among the population. In addition, both nationalist parties could draw upon émigré communities for financial support. Despite their initial advantages, however, important differences in their size, organization and membership affected their electoral success.

The main extreme right party, the HSP, was formed in February 1990 by the young dissident Dobroslav Paraga and a group of associates living in Croatia and abroad. The party pledged to fight for Croatian independence and criticized Tudjman for not being firm enough in pushing for Croatia’s secession from Yugoslavia. The independent state HSP leaders had in mind was a Great Croatian
state, including Bosnia-Hercegovina, in which there was no room for Serb autonomy of any kind: HSP rhetoric assumed a markedly anti-Serb tone. The HSP did not run independently in the elections of '90, probably due to its lack of organization and its unclear status as a legitimate player. Nevertheless, it quickly extended its contacts with the émigré community abroad, which provided a major source of funding, and began to establish party organizations throughout Croatia. In the months after the first multiparty elections in the spring of 1990, the HSP became a sharp critic of the Tudjman government, denouncing its negotiations with Belgrade over the future shape of Yugoslav federalism as an attempt to "sell out" Croatian interests. The party also opposed the promulgation of the 1990 constitution and spearheaded a drive to gather signatures for a petition to the United Nations calling for Croatian independence. The HSP organized demonstrations, like the one in Zagreb in December 1990, which drew thousands of people in spite of the fact that it was banned.4 Its membership, estimated at 18,000 at the end of 1990, grew to approximately 100,000 by the fall of 1991.5

As a result of his party's initial success, HSP leader Dobroslav Paraga became a main spokesman for ultranationalist views during the period from the first multiparty elections in 1990 to the second round of elections is 1992-1993. A former law and seminary student, Paraga spent most of the 1980s as a dissident to the Communist regime. Although Paraga was not initially the only powerful HSP leader, he quickly established his dominance over the party. Since extreme right parties tend to rely heavily on charismatic leaders for their success, this emergence of a commanding personality probably strengthened the HSP internally and enhanced its extremist credentials. Nevertheless, Paraga proved unable to project an appeal beyond his party’s own supporters or generate wider electoral support.

The HSP gained a great deal of political capital as it became associated with the activities of its paramilitary forces. When war broke out after Croatia’s declaration of independence in the summer of 1991, there was tremendous confusion in organizing Croatia's military forces. The newly formed national guard and the local police were pressed into service with inadequate weaponry and supplies. There was a huge gap in the military capacities of the country which the HSP’s paramilitary force, the Croatian Defense Force (Hrvatske obrambene snage, HOS), succeeded in filling. Calling on volunteers to fight against the 'Serbo-Bolsheviks' at the front, the HOS quickly swelled to several thousand fighters in the fall of 1991.6 Military headquarters were set up in Zagreb's old town and money from the Croatian community abroad was used to purchase arms and equipment. The HOS quickly earned the reputation as the most effective fighters in the field, especially during the defense of Vukovar where they held out for three months against well-equipped Serbian forces. Paraga's popularity soared when he charged Tudjman with failing to protect Vukovar and with having 'sold out' Eastern Slavonia. The HSP's paramilitary forces proved both a major source of extremist
support and a major threat to Tudjman, who sought to suppress HOS as quickly as possible after the cease fire in January 1992.

The second major political party espousing right wing political views is the ruling HDZ. Dismissed as a fringe party when it was formed by Franjo Tudjman in 1989 with the goal of achieving Croatian independence, it quickly became the major player in Croat political life. The party, estimated to have 500,000 members, campaigned throughout Croatia before the elections of 1990 with the help of 8.2 million dollars it raised from the émigré community abroad. Like the HSP, the HDZ proved adept at appropriating the traditional symbols of Croatian nationalism. Its simple program of anti-communism, Croatian independence, moral and national renewal and democracy attracted support from a wide segment of the population. When the party assumed control of the government in May 1990, it had a widely diverse membership. Indeed, according to data from 1990 election surveys, 10.8% of HDZ members were ideologically on the left, 42% in the center and 47% on the right. Nevertheless, while other East European conglomerate parties have splintered and gradually begun to resemble their West European counterparts, HDZ leaders have remained deeply ambivalent about the character of their party. On the one hand, they insist that the party is a Christian democratic party (the largest in Europe they point out), with strong ties to other European Christian democratic parties. On the other hand, they characterize the HDZ as a national liberation movement that represents the interests of the entire Croat population.

The relatively undefined character of the HDZ's political program and the diversity of its membership has contributed to the development of factions within the party. Indeed, factional struggle has been an enduring feature of the HDZ since its victory in the 1990 elections. Two main groups have emerged which can be loosely characterized as radical nationalist and technomanagerial. While the first focused primarily on nation and state-building issues, and found its institutional locus within the army and police, the second viewed the establishment of democracy and a free market economy as primary. This second group, which included some of Croatia’s most popular politicians, occupied the governmental and administrative structures of the new state apparatus. Its position within the party leadership has eroded during the past five years, however, as many of the original “managers” have left the HDZ or withdrawn from political life.

Tudjman’s increasingly powerful position within the party has contributed to this drain of moderate leaders from the HDZ. In contrast to the HSP, the HDZ did not initially emphasize a strong leadership principle in party affairs. Although Tudjman was an instrumental figure in founding the HDZ and a leading force in formulating its political program, there were other powerful and popular leaders associated with the ruling party. In the past several years, however, the party has become more centralized and Tudjman has increased his control. The president’s indisputable popularity, running about 11% ahead of his party and over 20% ahead of his closet rival among the opposition, has strengthened his role as mediator among the HDZ’s various factions and
his ideological sympathy with its extremist wing has contributed to the party's shift further to the right. 8

The Electoral Performance of Extremist Parties

Croatia has held several elections in the relatively brief period since its formation as an independent state. The circumstances under which they have occurred have changed rapidly as Croatia became involved in military conflict both on its own territory and in neighboring Bosnia-Hercegovina. Moreover, there have been several modifications of the electoral laws which have had a significant impact on how electoral performance is translated into institutional strength. The electoral performance of the two right wing parties demonstrates that while they have continued to draw support from most ultranationalist voters, this support has shifted in favor of the HDZ.

The elections of 1990, like other founding elections in Eastern Europe, occurred in a period of rapid change and uncertainty. These elections were, above all, directed against communism; established parties with defined programs and electorates had not yet emerged. In Yugoslavia the extreme uncertainty of the founding elections was heightened by the prolonged economic and societal crisis proceeding them and the growing tension among Yugoslavia's national groups. The electorate was polarized into national blocs with mutually incompatible positions on the future organization of the state and society. According to a study by Croatian political scientist Ivan Siber, the defining issue for voters in the '90 elections was Yugoslav unity versus Croatian independence; all other political questions were interpreted in relation to this issue. Indeed, in Croatia a vote for or against communism was highly correlated to membership in a particular national group, with Serbs much more favorably disposed toward the existing system and maintaining the status quo. 9

The HDZ entered the election as part of the Croatian Bloc of which it was the strongest member. The HSP did not compete separately in the election, although it cooperated with the Croatian Bloc. The HDZ's populist program--against communism and for maximum Croatian independence (either within a Yugoslav confederation or as a separate state)--was simple and unequivocal. The HDZ advocated a free market economy and the establishment of democratic institutions and practices. Insisting that Croatia was "one of the oldest European people," it also emphasized the priority of Croatian state-building concerns and the fight against "Great Serbian hegemonism." Conservative themes such as the need for a moral renewal of society and a closer relationship between church and state were an important part of its program. Promising to counter the "silence about Croatian history and people," the HDZ called for measures to increase the Croatian population and to return to the country those Croats living abroad. 10

The HDZ's wide appeal among the voters was indicated by the fact that it received 43% of the vote. It's attraction to right wing voters was particularly high. Of the voters who considered themselves to be ideologically on the extreme right, 67% voted for the HDZ. 11 This resulted in a
very strong bloc of center right and extreme right voters among the HDZ electorate; they constituted 42% of HDZ supporters. Most HDZ voters saw the most pressing problem facing the country as defining the relationship between Croatia and the rest of Yugoslavia and they perceived the HDZ as the best party to resolve this question. The strong support the HDZ received from the extreme right in the '90 elections probably contributed to its rightward drift during the next two years, although the outbreak of war in 1991 enhanced the popularity of nationalist themes among the entire populace. In any case, the majority system, which was introduced by the first electoral law in Croatia, gave the HDZ 69% of all mandates, and thereby ensured the right extremist electorate a powerful institutional voice.

The 1992 elections, which were held on August 2, took place once again in conditions of uncertainty and increased tensions between Serbs and Croats in Croatia. Croatia was entering its eight month of a cease fire brokered under the Vance Plan and enforced by UNPROFOR forces, although the country was still de facto at war. Several members of the opposition argued that the fact that the Croatian government did not have control over one third of its territory should have prevented the ruling party from holding elections. But the HDZ was determined to capitalize on Croatia's recent recognition by the international community and was convinced that early elections would strengthen it politically. The ruling party also believed elections necessary to secure legitimation for president Tudjman, who had not been popularly elected, and the new constitution promulgated in December 1990. As Ivan Siber put it, the '92 parliamentary and presidential elections were more "to reconfirm confidence in the governing party than to promote the newly established pluralist structures."

As in the 1990 elections, the campaign took place in the midst of recent changes in the electoral law. The new system, adopted on April 18 just weeks before the announcement of new elections, introduced a "segmented" electoral system, or a combination of majority and plurality systems. Of the 120 mandates for the lower house of parliament, sixty remained single member districts while the other sixty became multi-member districts. Segmental electoral systems are designed to combine the best of both proportional and majority electoral systems. However, as was often true in Eastern Europe, this system was also intended to meet the short term political needs of the ruling party, in this case HDZ. By adopting a proportion system in half the electoral districts, the HDZ hoped to thwart the announced intention of the opposition to unite behind a single opposition candidate. The HSP had no intention of cooperating with the liberal opposition and declared that it would offer a separate HSP list and candidates in all districts.

The HDZ ran on an election platform of putting the war behind Croatia and getting on with the business of rebuilding the country. It also attempted to take credit for what it termed the most significant state-building achievement in the last millennia. As Tudjman put it in his speech to a group of teachers in the spring of 1992: "Having achieved our greatest ideal in the national state
sense, the task before us now is to write a new enlightened page in Croatian history." While the HDZ leadership stressed national reconciliation as a major theme, it appropriated increasingly symbols from the wartime Ustasha state, the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna država Hrvatska, NDH). In addition to this symbolic identification with extremist elements of Croatian history, the HDZ continued to emphasize the importance of the émigré community, demographic renewal and moral revival. It also called for integration with Europe and touted Croatia's successful democratic transformation.

The HSP went into the '92 elections confidently (publicly anticipating 35% of the vote) with many foreign observers speculating about the large number of its “hidden supporters.” The party ran on a platform of continuing the war against Belgrade, expelling the UNPROFOR and establishing a Croatian state “within its natural and ethnic borders.” The platform called for the resignation of Vance, Carrington and Ghali for their role in concluding agreements inimical to Croatian interests. Integration with Europe was a goal, the HSP election program stated, but not “unconditionally and at any price.” The party rejected the “cantonization” of Bosnia and the continued existence of a “Chetnik krajina” within Croatia. Moreover, it continued to tout the military success of HOS, especially in Bosnia-Hercegovina. The HSP also continued its vigorous criticism of the Tudjman government during the campaign, charging it with corruption and treacherous activities during the war in 1991. While it argued that major political and economic reforms must wait until the end of the war against Serbia, it also warned against “Sachs-type” blueprints for change. Vowing to expose the “lies” about the Ustasha past, it continued its support of the NDH.

Despite its pre-election optimism, the HSP placed forth at the polls, garnering only 6.91% of the vote. Paraga received 5% of the presidential vote. The HDZ, in contrast, repeated its strong showing from two years previously, receiving about 43.7% of the vote. This translated into 62% of the parliamentary mandates as opposed to the HSP's 4%. Nevertheless, despite its poor showing in the elections, the HSP demonstrated its appeal to extreme right voters. 37.3% of which voted for the extremist party. The HDZ's portion of the extreme right electorate dropped from 61.7% in 1990 to 35.4% in 1992. This changed considerably the complexion of the HDZ. While in 1990, 42% of HDZ voters were identified as extreme right wingers, in 1992 this percentage fell to 21.7%. The HSP showed a much stronger right wing profile among its electorate with 57.5% of its supporters classified as extreme right wing.

There are several reasons why the HSP performed relatively poorly in the 1992 elections. First, in the months prior to the election, the HDZ attempted to weaken the HSP organizationally and politically in two ways: by harassment and repression, on the one hand, and by co-optation, on the other. From the outset of the war in Croatia, the popularity of the HOS and the HSP had alarmed the regime, which was worried about being outflanked on the right. Tudjman therefore took
steps to weaken the HSP leadership. Charges were brought against Paraga repeatedly for his activities relating to the HOS. Moreover, several HSP leaders were killed under mysterious circumstances, including HSP vice president Ante Paradzic who was shot by police at a checkpoint outside Zagreb. Not only Paraga, but members of other opposition parties charged the regime with complicity in these crimes. In the weeks before the campaign, Paraga was accused in the largely government-controlled press with being, among other things, “a US agent who worked for Belgrade.”

In addition to repressing the extreme right, Tudjman also attempted to co-opt it. Tudjman had been one of the original initiators of ‘revisionist’ historical accounts of the NDH, and his attempt to paint it in a more favorable light must have found some sympathy among right extremists. Moreover, the Croatian president was not adverse to adopting many of the symbols of the Ustasha state or attempting to rehabilitate some of its leaders. In the spring of 1992, the HDZ incorporated into its ranks the Croatian National Committee, the successor to a group of the same name founded by Branimir Jelić, a close associate of Ante Pavelić; Committee leaders were given two places on the HDZ executive board. Other former Ustasha leaders were nominated for government posts. This strengthening of the HDZ’s right-wing rhetoric caused Tudjman problems, as the unwieldy party was increasingly pulled between its right and left factions. Moreover, the HSP’s ability to attract right wing support despite the HDZ’s fierce campaign against it continued to worry the HDZ leadership, and in the months after the election the HDZ intensified its efforts to repress and weaken the HSP.

Finally, it appears that the HSP platform of expelling the UN forces and continuing the war was simply not appealing to a large portion of the electorate. Tudjman’s campaign message of getting on with the business of rebuilding the country had wide popular appeal, though the public became increasingly frustrated after the elections with the stalemated military situation in Croatia. Moreover, in the months after the implementation of the Vance Plan, there was a sense that the Croatian Army simply was not up to the task of continuing the war without more time to strengthen its forces. Supporting the HSP platform probably appeared to many to be a vote for an inevitable resumption of the war on terms that were not very favorable to Croatia. While the HSP’s call for resuming the war against Belgrade appealed to extremist voters, the party had adopted few other policies that could attract a wider portion of the electorate.

On October 30 1995 a third set of elections were held for the lower house of the Croatian parliament. Once again the right wing parties campaigned during dramatically different political circumstances than had existed three years previously. The elections were timed to capitalize on popular support for the president and the HDZ after the successful military campaigns in western Slavonia in the spring and in the Krajina area in August. By causing the vast majority of Serbs in these areas to flee the country, the Croatian leadership had substantially reduced the Serb population
and significantly altered political relations between these two groups in Croatia. Instead of discussing whether and how the regime should talk to representatives of the Serb population in Croatia, a major campaign issue now became whether and when to let them return to their homes. The elections also were intended to serve as an affirmation of the political and economic program of the ruling HDZ.

Although the institutional structures of the new state were no longer in great flux by this time, several changes were made in the electoral law shortly before the '95 elections. Critics charged that the Tudjman government was once again modifying electoral rules in order to ensure its own victory at the polls. First, in addition to the 5% threshold necessary for single parties to enter parliament, a threshold for coalitions was introduced of 8% for two parties and 11% for more than 2 parties. Secondly, the number of multimember constituencies was raised from 60 to 92, increasing the proportional elements of the segmented system. Thirdly, twelve seats were now reserved for the diaspora vote which was represented by a separate slate. Since the HDZ had solid support from the largest number of non-resident voters (Bosnian Croats) it could easily capture twelve more seats in parliament. Although approached by other parties about forming a united opposition, the HSP declared its intention to run separately in the elections and its conviction that it could capture the second largest number of votes.

The HDZ campaign for the '95 parliamentary elections did not introduce any new themes or alter the platform of the ruling party in significant ways. The HDZ continued to emphasize its state-building achievements, pointing particularly to its successful military campaigns in the preceding months. Despite objections from the opposition, the party attempted to identify the existence of the Croatian state with the HDZ and with Tudjman personally. As Tudjman panegyrist Hrvoje Sosic expressed it at the HDZ convention in October 1995: “Without Franjo Tudjman there would be no HDZ and without the HDZ there would be no Croatia.” The ruling party continued to stress its role in the “national reconciliation” of the Croatian population by calling for a re-dedication of the monument to the victims of fascism at Jasenovac, the largest Ustasha prison camp during the Second World War, as a monument to all victims of the war. Nevertheless, in contrast to the '92 election campaign when Tudjman actively appropriated Ustasha symbols and even organizations, the president now cautioned the HDZ about the dangers of too close an association with this part of Croatia’s past. The president emphasized his good relations with the west, the need to join European structures, and Croatia’s commitment to cooperate in reintegrating peacefully western Slavonia, Backa and Baranja. The HDZ pointed to “the wonder” of the stabilization of the Croatian kuna and advocated “more of the same” in transforming the economy.

In contrast to the ‘92 election campaign when the HSP and HDZ fought bitterly, relations between these two parties were now relatively harmonious. Indeed, HSP criticism of the ruling party had virtually ceased after Paraga was removed in the fall of 1993 and replaced by Ante Djapic.
Djapic quickly began to cooperate with the HDZ in parliament, prompting one opposition leader to describe him as "the extended hand" of the HDZ. Even critics within his own party began to charge him with being a tool of the HDZ. In the weeks before the 1995 election, Djapic emphasized repeatedly that the HSP currently had no aspirations to replace the ruling party. HSP leaders failed to offer their own position on the economy, insisting that only HDZ officials who had the "relevant information" in their hands were capable of answering such questions, and they offered only mild criticism of the corrupt economic practices of the HDZ. "We also offer a democratic state," Djapic stated in an interview during the campaign, "in which there will be social rights, order [and] work, and in which only persons of high moral standing can have duties in the state [administration] which today isn't the case for the most part."29

Despite the HSP's evident cooperation with the HDZ during the '95 election campaign, the ultranationalist party did stake out its own positions on a number of issues concerning relations with Serbs and the future borders of Croatia, themes which had traditionally been important to HSP voters. HSP leaders opposed allowing Serb refugees to return to Croatia, advocating instead that Croatian refugees and émigrés be resettled in the territories recently retaken by the Croatian Army.30 Moreover, they continued to call for achieving maximum Croatian borders (including all of Srijem and the Bay of Kotor) and preventing Serbs from crossing the Drina river. The HSP also continued to support a unified Bosnia, arguing that Croats and Muslims should be counted together in Bosnia's cantons, thereby allowing them to retain a majority and thus control in many of those areas where Serbs had the largest number of residents.31

The results of the 1995 elections were disappointing for both the extremist parties, although for different reasons. While the HDZ received 45.2% of the vote, the HSP barely passed the threshold necessary to be represented in parliament. Indeed, the opposition charged that the HSP only obtained its parliamentary seats through HDZ violation of the electoral law. Ballots that were invalidly marked (totaling 82,666 or 3.31% of ballots) were excluded from the total vote count, thereby increasing the percentage of HSP votes.32 The HDZ's percentage of the vote translated into 42 parliamentary seats or 52.5% of the mandates while the HSP's 5% of the vote translated into 4 seats or 5% of the mandates. Thus, the HDZ continued its dominance of parliament, although it did not receive the two thirds majority it needed (and hoped for) in order to make constitutional changes. Indeed, HDZ leaders were clearly unhappy with the party's electoral performance. Despite the recent military campaigns, the ruling party received about the same percentage of votes as in previous elections and its share of the urban vote continued to drop.

Despite its poorer than anticipated electoral performance, however, the HDZ picked up a significantly larger percentage of the extreme right vote than in the '92 election as large numbers of extremist voters switched from the HSP to the ruling party. In contrast to the '92 election in which 37.3% of right extremists had opted for the HSP, in '95 only 13.2% did so. Another 2.7% voted
for Dobroslav Paraga’s new political party, the HSP-1861. Meanwhile, 52.7% of extreme right wingers voted for the HDZ. While this did not reach the 67.1% level of support from right extremists in 1990, it was significantly higher than the 35.4% of the extreme right vote the HDZ received in 1992. This switch of extremist voters from the HSP to the HDZ shifted the distribution of attitudes within the HDZ further to the right. While in 1992 21.7% of HDZ supporters held extreme right views, in 1995 this percentage increased to 26.6%. Nevertheless, despite this increase the HSP continued to show a more homogenous right wing orientation than the ruling party, with 57.5% of its supporters holding extreme right views.33

There are several possible explanations for this shift in extreme right voters to the HDZ and the consequent drop in support for the HSP. First, the fierce factional struggles in the HSP since the last elections had weakened its internal structures and made its leaders vulnerable to charges of opportunism. Paraga’s virulent campaign against Djapic and his charges that the HDZ had infiltrated the HSP appear to have convinced many voters that the party could not be trusted. Moreover, the HSP’s cooperation with the HDZ on most issues made it difficult to distinguish ideologically between the obviously more effective ruling party and the often ineffective HSP. In short, the HDZ’s attempts to weaken the party by a combination of repression and co-optation appear to have paid off. Nevertheless, despite its success in attracting a large part of the right wing vote from the HSP, the ruling party did not improve significantly its standing among the general population. Support for the ruling party from the urban population continued to drop, prompting the HDZ leadership to launch an assault upon opposition parties in the capital and in other major cities. The strengthening of extremist elements among the HDZ leadership and the larger portion of its electorate now holding extremist views, however, will undoubtedly make the urban liberal vote increasingly difficult to capture.

Describing the Extreme Right Electorate

As the discussion of the elections presented above indicates, a significant portion of the HDZ and the HSP electorate describe themselves as being ideologically on the extreme right. In order to evaluate the dangers of right extremism, the characteristics of this group must be further explored. What are the social characteristics of the right extremists in Croatia? Do they represent an increasing or decreasing portion of the population? How and why do they support the two main right wing parties, the HDZ and the HSP? Are there significant differences between the extremist supporters of these two political parties?

Popular support for ultranationalism and the extreme right has usually been associated with severe social and economic strains. Although class-based theories of historic Fascism and the extreme right have not proved tenable, it has been argued more convincingly that neo-fascist and ultranationalist movements have attracted greater support when there is a severe economic and
The current fears concerning the rise of the extreme right in Russia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe are based upon this assumption that continued economic hardship and social dislocation will increase its appeal.

Evidence concerning the overall distribution of popular attitudes on a left-right continuum from 1990 to 1995 indicate that voters in Croatia increasingly identify with the center. Despite the war and dislocation of the past six years in Croatia, the overall portion of the population identifying with right extremist positions has continued to decline slightly. While in 1990 9.2% of the population could be classified as right extremist, in 1992 this group of the population fell to 8.6%. By 1995 it fallen still further to 7.9%. During this period those citizens who identified with the political center remained approximately 81%.

Thus, fears that the political and economic situation in Croatia since the collapse of state socialism in 1990 would translate into increasing extremism do not appear to be supported by available survey data.

Given that right wingers are a fairly small portion of the population, do they possess particular demographic characteristics? Forming a clearer sense of the social profile of right extremists can help explain who is most receptive to the extremist message and why. Although the demographic data on ultranationalists and right extremists are incomplete, it is possible to make some observations and dispel some misconceptions concerning this group of the population. Moreover, it is possible to distinguish differences among supporters of the two main political parties representing extremist views.

The first misconception dispelled by survey data is that extremism is primarily a rural phenomenon. The war in the former Yugoslavia has sometimes been portrayed as a conflict launched by nationalist peasants on a more cosmopolitan, urban population. While this conception of the war in Bosnia may be partially true, ultranationalists and right extremists in Croatia are more likely to be found in cities than in villages and small towns. According to data compiled by Ivan Grdesic, 34.4% of right extremists come from cities while only 23.2% come from villages. The portion of the population in towns espousing extremist views falls somewhere between these two at about 25%. Thus while the HSP received much of its support in 1992 from rural districts close to the fighting (though in no district did it receive more than 10% of the vote), the extremist electorate overall is not concentrated in rural areas. In the 1995 elections, rural ultranationalists tended to vote for the HDZ, which drew most of its support from non-urban areas. The HSP, in contrast, received slightly more of its support from the urban population.

The phenomenon of right wing extremism and ultranationalism is associated in Croatia as elsewhere in Europe with the young. In 1995, 25% of extremists came from the 18-28 age group, suggesting that they are attracted to the unequivocal message and militant prescriptions of the extreme right political parties. Interestingly, a slightly larger percentage of population with extreme right views, 27.2%, is between 40 and 50 years of age. Support of the radical right is not typical
of this age group elsewhere in Europe and may be associated with the particular experiences of this
cohort in Croatia. This group came to political age during the Croatian Spring in 1971 and many of
them suffered personally from the repression that followed it. Data suggest that while HSP appeals
to this younger group of extremists, the HDZ appeals to the 40-50 year olds. Although the HDZ
initially appealed heavily to younger voters, this profile of HDZ voters changed dramatically by
1992. In the second parliamentary elections, the HDZ now had the highest number of old people of
any of the major political parties, while the HSP had the highest proportion of young people.\(^3^9\)
The HSP appeared to have become a party of the militant, youthful protest vote.

In terms of socio-economic status, extreme right wingers tend to come from a relatively
modest background. Given the strong correlation of education with occupational status, the
educational background of right extremists provides important an indication of the social profile of
this group. According to Ivan Grdesic's 1995 data, the largest category of right extremists have
completed junior high (srednja skola) which separates them in their career expectations from their
college bound peers. A significant and roughly equal portion of extreme right-wingers, however,
have both more and less than average education. While 10.8% have completed 7th grade, 10.3% of
right extremists have completed college and graduate degrees.\(^4^0\)

This data on the educational background of right extremists is confirmed by the social profile
of support for the HDZ and HSP in the 1992 elections. Both parties drew heavily on the blue collar
vote. However, there were some interesting occupational differences in the electorate of these two
parties. The HSP, for example, appealed to members of the army and policie, receiving more than
three times as much support from these groups as from any other occupational category. The HSP
also did well among private businessmen and students. The HDZ, in contrast, did poorly among
members of the army and policy, as well as among professionals and students. The ruling party
received high levels of support from housewives and pensioners, and from civil servants who relied
on the HDZ controlled bureaucracy for their employment.\(^4^1\) These social differences are reflected
in the divergent political views expressed by HSP and HDZ voters, although both groups possess a
clear extreme right value orientation.

When examining the value orientation of right wing voters, it is important to consider their
attitudes toward the two main components of political change-democratization and the move toward a
market economy. On questions of social policy, right extremists are not generally distinguishable
from the rest of the population. They endorse policies that reduce unemployment and achieve
"social justice."\(^4^2\)

Moreover, they generally uphold democratic processes such as freedom of speech (95%), the right to
demonstrate (approximately 70%) and the existence of a strong parliamentary opposition.(85%).
They are alarmed at the prospect of social conflict, however, and believe that the clash of different
interests damages the "general interest." (75%). Indeed, approximately 90% of right extremists
believe that the interest of the people must be placed above the separate interests of individuals, and many are willing to restrict individual and civil rights when the interests of the nation are at stake. This is particularly true of the HDZ electorate, 50% of which advocates restricting individual rights in such cases; 40% of HSP voters support this position. Although both groups of voters display a high measure of respect for authority, this value is also particularly prominent among HDZ supporters. While right wing supporters of both parties endorse "private entrepreneurship", this value appears to be particularly important to HSP voters some of whom adopt a more neo-liberal approach to the economy.

In addition to their weak support for individual rights and liberties and their strong emphasis on community, right extremists strongly support religious values and a close relationship between church and state. According to 1995 survey data, 47% of right extremists are seriously religious while 49.5% are "customary believers," those who attend church several times a year on holidays or to celebrate marriages and baptisms. The fact that a mere 2.9% of right wingers are not religious suggests a very high correlation between religious belief and a tendency to hold right wing views. Both the HSP and especially the HDZ have attempted to capitalize on this religious vote by opposing abortion, although 62% of right wingers do not want to restrict abortion rights. Nevertheless, the HDZ's emphasis on spiritual and moral renewal has attracted support from the religious, and spiritual renewal is cited as the most important social and political goal by the majority of HDZ voters.

Perhaps the most important value for successful democratic transition in Croatia involves attitudes toward other national groups. On this question, right extremists continue to display a high degree of intolerance. Fully 71% of this segment of the Croat population does not want Serbs "to live in my state," 78% do not want Serbs as neighbors, 79% do not want Serbs as colleagues, 81.1% do not want Serbs as friends and 90.7% do not want Serbs as relatives. Extremists' hostility toward Serbs and other national groups such as Muslims and Albanians is considerably higher than for the population as a whole, approximately 21 to 23% of which give similar answers. Their intolerance toward Serbs is expressed by their opposition to the return of Serb refugees who fled the country in August 1995. While 15.7% of right extremists believe that Serbs should be allowed to return, 22.2% think that only some should welcomed back and 62.2% believe that no Serbs should be allowed to return to Croatia in the future. Such attitudes are particularly prevalent among HSP supporters who tend to be more radical on the Serb question and to support national closure. HSP voters typically list national unity and a strong army as their most important political goals. Interestingly, right wing supporters of both political parties display high levels of support for European integration, though for a portion of this electorate integration may also represent a means of maintaining a crucial distinction from the "non-European" Serbs.
In sum, while right wing voters share many political values, there are important differences in the ideological profiles of extremists in the HDZ and the HSP. The HSP is a more ideologically coherent party than the HDZ, and its followers tend to be more in favor of national closure, less respectful of authority and less supportive of restricting individual rights than HDZ voters. The HDZ electorate, in contrast, is ultraconservative in its emphasis on tradition, respect for authority and the church, and the need to restrict individual rights for the good of the entire community. In both cases, extremists’ attenuated view of individual and civil rights and their intense hostility toward other national groups does not suggest a high level of support for the values that underpin a liberal polity.

Conclusion

The emergence of nationalist and right extremist political parties in Eastern Europe has often been portrayed as the result of unscrupulous leaders who have manipulated the populace for their own political purposes. In the former Yugoslavia, where extreme nationalism has had the most dire consequences, a few leaders have been charged with launching a war that nobody wanted and nobody believed in. While this picture of political elites in the former Yugoslavia obviously contains some truth, it overlooks the complex interaction among elites and mass publics that forms the politics of extremism characteristic of this conflict. Political parties provide a good way to study this interaction since they are the main conduit of elites mass relations in post-communist (and democratic) societies. This study of extremist political parties and their electorates suggests that, however they acquired these opinions, a significant bloc of voters holds right extremist and ultranationalist views. Indeed, evidence presented here indicates that both the HDZ and the HSP have reflected the opinions of a significant portion of their electorate, in other words, that there is a high degree of correspondence between voters’ views and values and the parties’ platforms and policies.

The extremist electorate in Croatia resembles its counterpart in other European countries in that it is young, religious and slightly more likely to be from urban areas. Extremist parties everywhere draw a certain amount of youth protest vote and this seems to be the case in Croatia too. Nevertheless, a large number of extremists are from the generation (forty to fifty years of age) which is reaching its peak in terms of political and professional activity. This may account in part for the greater public visibility of right extremists in Croatia than in many other European countries. In Croatia we can identify two groups of right extremists and these are attracted to different political parties. While HSP voters can be characterized as primarily ultranationalist and militantly anti-Serb. HDZ voters are ultraconservative and highly suspicious of liberals’ emphasis on individual rights. Both groups of extremists, however, see national unity as a primary political goal. Despite the acute social and political strain in Croatia during the past several years, the extreme right electorate has
continued to drop slightly and, at about 8% of the population, is roughly equivalent in size to the extreme right in other European countries. Nevertheless, intolerance toward other national groups, a marked feature of right extremists, is displayed by roughly one quarter of the population in Croatia. The political impact of this animosity toward Serbs, Muslims and other national groups depends, to a certain extent, on the activities of the extreme right parties, particularly the ruling HDZ.

The HDZ has attempted to capture the extreme right vote and, judging from the last election, it has largely succeeded. Although the HSP remains a more homogenous extreme right party, its electoral position has continued to decline. This poor performance is a result of a lack of appeal of its extremist positions among the wider electorate. Moreover, a portion of its own hard core electorate appears to have become disaffected with the extreme right party. Repression and co-optation by the HDZ which have contributed to factional struggle within the HSP, and the disbanding of its paramilitary force, HOS, have caused the extreme right electorate to vote in increasing numbers for the HDZ. HSP splinter groups may succeed in founding a new political party that will be able to surmount some of these weaknesses. However, voters may continue to find it difficult to distinguish ideologically between the HDZ and a new HSP.

The HDZ currently appeals to a much wider segment of the population than the HSP but evidence suggests that it has drifted rightward during the past several years. This drift appears to be occurring both among the party’s elite and its constituency. The departure of more moderate elements and the co-optation of extremist elements within the HDZ leadership, the increasing centralization of the party, and Tudjman’s affinity with the radical nationalist wing have contributed to this strengthening of right extremism among HDZ elites. At the same time, the defection of many HSP voters to the HDZ in the 1995 elections has resulted in an increase in the HDZ electorate holding extremist views. This growth in extremists among the leadership and the electorate does not bode well for the democratic orientation of the ruling party. Although the HDZ continues to suffer from factional struggle, it seem unlikely to splinter as long as Tudjman remains its leader, which he has vowed to do for the foreseeable future. The HDZ will probably continue to resemble more of a movement than a political party—with a large and influential extremist element—which is used by Tudjman and other HDZ leaders for state-building purposes. Thus, a relatively small number of well-positioned right extremists in Croatia could thwart the establishment of democratic institutions and practices desired by the rest of the population.
Endnotes


6 According to an HOS commander interviewed in the fall of 1991, the HOS had 30,000 to 40,000 soldiers in the field. (T. Rogers, 'Going to War with a Camera', Soldier of Fortune, May 1992, p. 72.) This is considerably higher than the figures Paraga gave in an interview in October 1991 in which he claimed that HOS had 2,000 soldiers at the front and 10,000 waiting to be deployed. R. Moseley, “Croatian Extremist Spoiling for Wider War”, Chicago Tribune, 7 October 1991, p. 8.

7 Unless otherwise noted, all data are taken from the pre-election surveys conducted in 1990, 1992, and 1995 by the Department of Political Science, the University of Zagreb. Data more specifically on the attitudes and demographic characteristics of extreme right voters were compiled by Dr. Ivan Grdesic from the Department of Political Science. Portions of his data will appear in a forthcoming chapter entitled “Radical Right in Croatia and Its Constituency,” in Sabrina P. Ramet ed, Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe, University of Washington Press, forthcoming. I am very grateful to Dr. Grdesic for sharing his data with me.

8 See Globus polls. For example, at the beginning of 1996, Tudjman received 37.4% support while his party, the HDZ received 26% of popular support. Tudjman’s closest rival among the opposition, HSLS leader Drazen Budisa received the support of 15.5% of the respondents to this poll. Globus, 19 January, 1996, p. 14.


11 Data from Ivan Grdesic.


16 Ibid.


19 Data from Ivan Grdesic.


22 For example, there was a move to name a street next to the Faculty of Philosophy after Mite Budak who was a high ranking member of the Ustasha regime. The vigorous protest of the Jewish community in Zagreb stopped this effort, though there are streets named after Budak in other towns in Croatia.

23 Culic, cit., Danas, 7 April, 1992 pp. 7-10.

24 Tudjman has named at least two former Ustasha officials to government posts. He nominated Ivo Rojnic, former Ustasha commander in Dubrovnik, as ambassador to Argentina and Vinko Nikoli, who was an official in the Ustasha Ministry of Education, to a seat in Parliament.


Six opposition political parties have filed suit again the government of Croatia with the UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva in order to have this practice declared invalid.

Data from Ivan Grdesic.


Data from Ivan Grdesic.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.